DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 246 314 CG 017 554

AUTHOR Mosatche, Harriet S.; And Others
TITLE A Cross-Sectional Investigation of the Quality of Adult Sibling Relationships.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. on Aging (DHHS/NIH), Bethesda, MD.
PUB DATE Apr 84
GRANT 1-RO1-AG03070-02
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association (Baltimore, MD, April 12-15, 1984). For the authors' related research, see ED 222 831.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adult Development; *Adults; Emotional Response; Individual Development; *Interpersonal Relationship; Life Satisfaction; *Siblings
IDENTIFIERS Intimacy

ABSTRACT

Recent psychological investigations have demonstrated the significant impact of the sibling relationship throughout the lifespan. To determine the extent of developmental consistency in sibling relationships, 62 working class adults (40 female, 22 male) were interviewed about the nature of their relationship with the sibling to whom they felt closest. The subjects were stratified by age and life period into four groups: 21 young adults (mean age, 19.4 years); 13 adults (mean age, 30.4 years); 15 middle-aged adults (mean age, 43.4 years); and 13 pre-retirement adults (mean age, 57.6 years). A 26-category system, which divided respondents' thoughts on the basis of ideas rather than grammatical structures, was used to code the interview data. An analysis of the results showed that the intimacy category was significantly higher during the two earliest periods of the adult life cycle in contrast to the middle-aged and pre-retirement periods. However, no significant age effects were obtained for the following categories: positive affect, reciprocity, compatibility, similarity, activity, instrumental support, or expressive support. The findings reflect consistency in the sibling relationship across the adult life cycle, with emotional support characterizing that bond. (BL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED246314

A Cross-Sectional Investigation of the Quality of Adult Sibling Relationships

Harriet S. Mosatche and Eileen M. Brady
College of Mount St. Vincent

Mary R. Noberini and Marsha B. Brody
Manhattan College

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Harriet S. Mosatche

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

CG 017554

The present research was supported by Grant 1 RO1-AG03070-02 from the National Institute on Aging. The authors are grateful to Nancy Di Senso, Linda Gibbs, Leslie Hogan, Patti Hogan, Maura Hughes, Terry Huvane, Alice Miele, Alan Rappaport, and Jeanette Ryan for their help on this project.

Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association, Baltimore, Maryland, April, 1984.

A Cross-Sectional Investigation of the Quality of Adult Sibling Relationships

Recent psychological investigations have demonstrated the significant impact of the sibling relationship throughout the lifespan (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Cicirelli, 1982; Ross, Dalton, & Milgram, 1980; Ross & Milgram, 1980, 1982). Although these studies have provided insight into the nature of the sibling relationship, they have been hampered by the use of global content analyses of interview data and unidimensional scales. In an attempt to examine the multidimensional nature of the sibling relationship, Mosatche, Brady, and Noberini (1983) analyzed retrospective interview data from pre-retirement adults, employing a seven-category coding system. The results indicated that specific facets of the relationship were more evident at specific periods of the life cycle. Differentiation was more characteristic of adolescence, while positive affect was reported more frequently during early adulthood. In contrast, Noberini, Mosatche, and Brady (1983) demonstrated a remarkable stability in the relationship with the closest sibling using a 75-item Likert Scale, the Scale of Sibling Relationships, on a cross-sectional sample of adults. Thus, the current investigation sought to determine the extent of devlopmental consistency in the sibling relationship to resolve these conflicting results by employing both an expanded coding system for interview data and a cross-sectional design.

METHOD

Sample

The sample consisted of 40 female and 22 male working-class adults drawn from the Bronx area of New York. The volunteers were stratified by age and life period into the following groups: (1) 21 young adults between 18 and 23 ($\bar{X}$ = 19.4 years), (2) 13 adults between 25 and 35 ($\bar{X}$ =30.4 years), (3) 15 middle-aged adults between 36 and 50 ($\bar{X}$ = 43.4 years), and (4) 13 pre-retirement adults between 50 and 65 ($\bar{X}$ = 57.6 years).

Procedure

All subjects were interviewed either in their homes or at the College of Mount St. Vincent by trained interviewers. Interview sessions were tape recorded with the permission of the respondents who were asked to describe the nature of their relationship with the sibling to whom they felt closest at that time. Standard probes were utilized to elicit as much information as possible (e.g.,"Tell me more about your relationship with your brother").

Coding

The 26-category system developed for coding the open-ended interview data represented a significant expansion of the system reported in a preceding study (Mosatche, Brady, & Noberini, 1983). The subject's responses were divided into thoughts on the basis of ideas, rather than grammatical structures. A statement such as "Sally is so kind and helpful to me as well as beautiful" was divided into three codable thoughts. In some instances, two or more categories were employed to code one thought.

Twenty-three of the 26 categories were used to code thoughts that pertained to the relationship. Those 23 relationship categories with their respective descriptions and examples follow:

1. positive affect - feelings of warmth and love (e.g., "I love my sister.")

2. negative affect - feelings of hostility (e.g., "He resents my success.")

3. reciprocity - reciprocal support and affection (e.g., "Bill and I are always there for each other.")

4. lack of reciprocity - lack of mutual support or affection (e.g., "I often do favors for her, but she never seems to have the time for me.")

5. compatibility - enjoying being with one's sibling (e.g., "We have fun with each other.")

6. lack of compatibility - not enjoying being with one's sibling (e.g., "I don't enjoy being in Sue's company.")

7. similarity - possessing identical or similar attitudes, interests or values (e.g., "We both believe in religious training for our children.")

8. differentiation - possessing different attitudes, interests, or values (e.g., "Jane is a Republican and I'm a Democrat.")

9. activity - engaging in an activity with one's sibling (e.g., "We frequently go to the movies together.")

10. lack of activity - not engaging in an activity with one's sibling (e.g., "We don't have the kind of a relationship where we play sports together.")

11. instrumental support - active, physical assistance (e.g., "When I was ill, Tim did the grocery shopping for me.")

12. lack of instrumental support - failure to provide active, physical assistance (e.g., "After my accident, Ann was too busy at work to run errands for me.")

13. expressive support - emotional assistance (e.g., "When I fight with my husband, I can always cry on Helen's shoulders.")

14. lack of expressive support - absence of emotional assistance (e.g., "When I need some sympathy, I can't go to my sister.")

15. positive role modeling - following a sibling's positive example (e.g., "I'm probably going to college now because Nancy graduated from college.")

16. negative role modeling - not following a sibling's negative example (e.g., "He was such a poor father that I knew that I would never treat my children like that.")

17. acceptance/role ascription - unconditional acceptance due to the sibling role (e.g., "If he weren't my brother, I wouldn't have forgiven him for not coming to my daughter's wedding.")

18. lack of acceptance/lack of role ascription - lack of acceptance of the sibling (e.g., "I can't really think of him as a brother any longer because of what he did.")

19. intimacy - emotional closeness (e.g., "I often confide in her.")

20. emotional distance - lack of intimacy (e.g., "I can't imagine confiding in my brother.")

21. physical proximity - residing close to the sibling (e.g., "We live next door to each other.")

22. physical distance - residing relatively far from the sibling (e.g., "She lives too far from here.")

23. other - thoughts about the sibling relationship which do not fit into the above categories. (e.g., "He talked to his wife about me.")

Three additional categories were used to code thoughts that described the sibling, but not the sibling relationship. "Everyone thinks that Steven is very

smart" is an example of the positive description of sibling category while "He is very mean to his children sometimes" is an example of the negative category. An example of neutral description of the sibling category is "Red is her favorite color."

For each respondent, the number of coded thoughts in the category was divided by the total number of thoughts describing the relationship. This proportion was multiplied by 100 to yield a percentage. After coding by two trained coders, interrater reliabilities for 20 randomly selected interviews were determined. Each category achieved statistical significance at the .01 level.

RESULTS

A single-factor analysis of variance (ANOVA), using an unweighted means solution (Winer, 1971) was utilized to examine the quality of the relationship with the closest sibling as a function of the respondent's life period.

The ANOVA results indicated that the Intimacy category was significantly higher during the two earliest periods of the adult life cycle in contrast to the middle-aged and pre-retirement periods ($F_{(3,58)} = 3.57$; $p < .05$). However, no significant age effects were obtained for the following categories: Positive Affect, Reciprocity, Compatibility, Similarity, Activity, Instrumental Support and Expressive Support. ANOVAs were not computed for other categories (e.g., Negative Role Modeling) because of insufficient numbers of relevant thoughts.

DISCUSSION

In general, the findings reflect consistency in the nature of the sibling relationship across a large part of the adult life cycle. This is, salient aspects of the relationship, such as the provision of emotional support during times of crisis, appear to characterize the sibling bond throughout the adult period. However, the specific manner in which these aspects are manifested may change from one life period to the next. For example, instrumental support may take the form

of helping a brother with his college work during young adulthood but may mean babysitting for a sister's child during the following life period.

The one finding of inconsistency, the greater intimacy exhibited by the two younger adult groups, may or may not have clinical significance. It is possible that during middle age and the pre-retirement years, individuals other than siblings (e.g., spouse, children, friends) take over some of the intimacy functions, such as acting as confidant, previously performed by one's brother or sister.

The relatively small sample in the present study precludes the examination of possible mediating variables such as the sex composition of the sibling pair. Moreover, relatively few coding categories were sufficiently represented in this study to warrant analysis. However, other avenues of research might be pursued using the present multidimensional categorization system. For example, a comparison of intimate and emotionally distant relationships or a longitudinal investigation of the stability of various dimensions of the sibling relationship might well produce interesting and significant results.

REFERENCES

Bank, S.P. & Kahn, M.D. (1982). The sibling bond. New York: Basic Books, Inc.

Cicirelli, V.G. (1982). Sibling influence throughout the lifespan. In M.E. Lamb & B. Sutton-Smith (Eds.), Sibling relationships: Their nature and significance across the lifespan (pp. 267-284). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Mosatche, H.S., Brady, E.M., & Noberini, M.R. (1983). A retrospective lifespan study of the closest sibling relationship. Journal of Psychology, 113, 237-243.

Noberini, M.R., Mosatche, H.S., Brady, E.M. (November, 1983). Developmental changes in adult sibling relationships. Paper presented at the annual scientific meeting of the Gerontological Society of America.

Ross, H.G., Dalton, M.J., & Milgram, J.I. (November, 1980). Older adults: Perceptions of closeness in sibling relationships. Paper presented at the annual scientific meeting of the Gerontological Society. San Diego, California.

Ross, H.G. & Milgram, J.I. (1982). Important variables in adult sibling relationships: A qualitative study. In M.E. Lamb & B. Sutton-Smith (Eds.), Sibling relationships: Their nature and significance across the lifespan (pp. 225-250). Hillsdale, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Publishers.

Ross, H.G. & Milgram, J.I. (September, 1980). Rivalry in adult sibling relationships: Its antecedents and dynamics. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Psychological Association, Montreal, Canada.

Winer, B.J. (1971) Statistical principles in experimental design (2nd ed.). New York: McGraw Hill.